

433 hunting. The little time devoted to the preparation of tools for
512 the main subsistence enterprises reflects the degree of technological
substitution which has occurred since contact.

Construction and repair of houses normally continues throughout the year, here occupying 1.6 hours per man-week. In Sivepe such activity declined during the course of the survey as plans were formulated to transfer the village to the new site. Of 13 houses whose occupants were not newcomers to the village, 4 were completely rebuilt during the year and, in addition, 2 completely new houses were built and a number of extensions and repairs made to others. This 'crude birth rate' suggests the life of a house to be about 3.25 years. Since each house takes about 110 man-hours to build (including the gathering of materials), about 0.6 hours per man-week must be devoted to reconstruction in a normal year. In Sivepe about 0.9 hours were devoted as a result of additional houses being built, the balance (0.7 hours) accounting for repairs and minor extensions.

[342] Household tasks occupy 5.3 hours per man-week, cooking predominating with 5.0 hours. Of necessity, they vary little through the year.¹ Much of the time taken up by cooking involves simply tending the fire on which the food is being prepared and it is then that the women often work on their string bags. Most firewood is obtained as a by-product of clearing, suitable lengths of timber being stacked in the garden to dry out and then carried to the village as required.

[252] All the above subsistence activities (food production, construction, handicraft work and household tasks) can be described as
[462] 'productive' in that 'the purposeful alteration and combination of physical material' (Udy 1959:2) can be discerned in them. Together they account for 26.6 out of the total of 30 hours per man-week devoted to the subsistence sector of the economy.

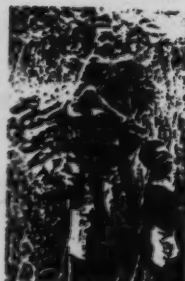
512 Only 3.4 hours per man-week are spent in fulfilling social
182 obligations. Although categorised here as non-productive activity, it should be stressed that ritual and informal social interaction are part of the fabric of the total economic system and the kinship networks which form the framework for these interactions serve as the major mechanism for distributing goods produced within the subsistence economy.

[171] Belshaw, in discussing Melanesian exchange, states (1963:35):
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A primary point to note is that a very high proportion of social contacts between adults is accompanied by gift-giving.

¹ The figure for cooking in period I is an estimate, derived from averaging the figures for the following periods, since relevant records were not initially kept.

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[Housewife carrying garden produce and firewood back to her village, a distance of up to four miles. Her load, excluding baby, is about 100 pounds.]

INTRODUCTION

433 THE traditional economy of New Guinea villages was radically different from our own. Whilst our economy is based upon the production of surplus goods which can be sold for profit, thus providing capital which in turn may be invested to produce greater profits, the key note of the New Guinea economy was self-sufficiency. Traditionally, the people of

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[222] New Guinea were subsistence cultivators planting their food crops in small clearings in the forests and supplementing this food supply by fishing, by hunting the animals which live in the forests and on the grasslands and by gathering the edible produce of wild vegetation, notably sago. Only the simplest implements were available: stone axes with which trees could be laboriously felled or ring-barked; fire for burning-off the mass of felled timber, vines, and leaves; and sharpened sticks with which holes were made for planting seeds and cuttings. In only a few limited areas, notably the central highlands of the main island, was there any attempt at digging or cultivating the soil prior to planting; in most areas cuttings or seeds were planted in holes made directly in the cleared, ash-covered ground. The burned clearing thus made and used for the growing of food crops is referred to in this book as a swidden.

[128] Such an economy, in which there was no concept of saving and no profit motive, tended to be resistant to change; innovation was unnecessary. But with the coming of white men possessing a superior technology, an important change occurred; steel axes, knives, and spades

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Fig. 7. The New Guinea gardener's work tools, an axe, and large bush knife. The strong heavy spear is carried just in case he should see a wild pig. The cigarette, rolled with newspaper, is almost indispensable to most New Guineans

trunk of the sago palm which grows in wet or swampy ground. The sago is extracted by first cutting down the palm, then pounding up the fibre and washing out the starch. This passes through a coconut fibre screen into a settling tank. Four people can make 100 pounds of sago a day.

c) *Grass fires.* The origin and extension of tropical grasslands has long been a matter of debate. Large areas of grassland occur in Yega territory where villagers regard them as practically useless. Grasslands are extended by fire but only in special circumstances. Grassland fires seldom penetrate or destroy an area of mature rain forest or even areas of well-developed secondary growth. The danger period is the first two years after a swidden is abandoned. At this time there is a large quantity of grass and undergrowth amongst the young trees. If a fire spreads from adjacent grasslands to this highly inflammable material the young trees are destroyed. Being immature, they have not yet seeded and further forest regrowth is prevented. This circumstance is most likely to occur on the south-west margins of grassland areas where strong north-easterly

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- 392 sea breezes, during the dry season (May to August) drive fires across the grasslands against the forest wall.

HOUSING AND VILLAGE LIFE

- 342 The Yega make three types of buildings each with a separate function; the vernacular names for these buildings are *mando*, *dobo* and *gaga*. The *mando* is the building where a man and his family normally live. It is a well-built structure about sixteen to twenty feet by twelve to sixteen feet, set on hardwood piles, with the floor about four feet above the ground. The framework is of untrimmed bush poles about four to six inches in diameter, nailed together (the fifty or sixty cents for nails is the only cash expense in building the house). The floor is of split lengths of limbom palm, laid with the convex trunk side uppermost so that there are no splinters. Walls are made of lengths of the two inch thick midrib of sago palm fronds lashed vertically. The lashing usually leaves a space of quarter to half an inch between each pair of strips allowing any cooling breeze to blow through at all times. The roof is thatched with sago-leaf 'tiles'. The house is divided internally into two or three rooms, with a verandah in front.
- (824) The entrance ladder is frequently the worst constructed part of the house. It is often rickety and dangerous, but even small children and dogs seem to negotiate it without falling.
- 252 Cooking is usually done in front of the house or, in wet weather, underneath it. Some houses
- 354 have a mud hearth three feet square and four inches thick, or the top of a forty-four gallon drum covered with two inches of sand, in one of the rooms to serve cooking and heating purposes. Food is cooked in a pot balanced over the fire on three stones or, nowadays, on three empty meat tins. Furniture is simple. There are no tables, chairs, or bedsteads.
- 352 Sleeping mats are of woven pandanus leaf. There is often a light blanket or two, baskets
- 353 and bags hang from the ceiling and in every
- 415 house is a box or suitcase containing the wife's shell jewellery and the husband's ceremonial dancing finery, woven bracelets, feather head dresses, and shell and dog-teeth masks. Another box or suitcase contains the couple's
- [P.10-B]

353 *tapa* cloths, also worn on ceremonial occasions; often nowadays mother's best dress and
 [415] father's best shorts and shirt are also kept in this box. Everyday tools—fishing spears, pig spear, bush knife, and axe—are stored between the floor joists under the floor platform. A bundle of dry firewood may be stored under the house in case of a prolonged spell of wet
 [372] weather. The dwelling of each clan fishing-leader is easily recognized by the large seine net hung to dry under the eaves or rolled in a corner of the verandah.
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342 The Yega build one other form of dwelling, a garden shelter (*dobo*) usually roughly constructed with leaf walls, frequently open at one end and often so low from floor to roof that a person cannot stand erect in it. A *dobo* is a temporary dwelling, built near the swidden in current use, and used by a man and his family for up to a week at a time while they are working in their gardens, which may be three or four miles from the village. The *dobo* is also used to shelter from rain or to take a siesta during shorter, one-day visits to the garden.

343 A *gaga* is simply a talking platform where men sit for a chat, a chew (of betelnut) or a smoke during siesta time, or after the day's work is done. There is usually at least one
 [461] *gaga* for each clan in a village. The *gaga* performs an important social function for it is here that quarrels are settled, marriages arranged, and the everyday problems and business of the village discussed and finalised.
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291 Everyday clothing is a pair of shorts and maybe a shirt or a singlet for boys and men, and a cotton dress or skirt for girls and women.

[287] The traditional body covering for both men and women was beaten out bark-cloth of the paper mulberry tree. This is used throughout the Pacific and is known as *tapa*. *Tapa* skirts and loin cloths are still worn on special occasions, such as weddings and New Year singings, while many older people wear *tapa* to church on Sundays. The Yega and their neighbours are expert *tapa*-makers but they did not
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323 have either the suitable clay or the art of pot-making. They used to trade their *tapa* for pots from Ambasi, thirty miles to the north, and from Wanigela, 100 miles to the south. This trade has now declined because everybody can
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[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 12-A]